

SHALL WE CONNECT? Regions response to the COVID-19 crisis

On May 14, 2020, the Spanish-speaking members of ORU Fogar, and on the 15th the francophones, participated in a virtual meeting in which practices and experiences were shared in relation to how regions around the world were fighting the pandemic. Thus, in keeping with the spirit of interaction of the organization, health, social, food and economic reactivation actions were explained.

Abdessamad Sekkal, president of ORU Fogar

President Sekkal, who sent a video to the meeting of Spanish-speakers and participated in meeting of Francophones, highlighted the role of the regions in the fight against the pandemic. He affirmed that, beyond the regions with competences in the health field, the regions in general had been key in spreading the recommendations and raising awareness among the population about the epidemic. He also highlighted the important role that regions are playing in serving the most disadvantaged layers.

He said COVID-19 requires a major overhaul of state governance. "However important it may seem to strengthen the role of the nation state," he said, "it will be necessary to strengthen the role of local and regional governments in order to better respond to the needs of citizens and face the great challenges posed by this crisis". He said that, within the framework of ORU Fogar, a broad debate should be opened on the changes needed in the mode of state governance and the role of regions and local government in the world.

President Sekkal put the terms of the debate: "In all countries, today, there is talk of the importance of sovereignty in the face of globalization and of the need to have strong economies to confront it. From here, there are two ways to approach the issue. The first is strengthening the role of the central state, a process that can be dangerous in countries that have not completed their democratic transition. The second is the one that seeks to restore power to the territorial, regional and local communities. It is necessary to decentralize. In this sense, again, in the management of the COVID-19 crisis, the effectiveness of the German model has been demonstrated".

Abdessamad Sekkal argued that ORU Fogar should participate in these debates at national or international level to support the second path, that of decentralization, and review the role of regions in the world. He also explained that the pandemic makes it necessary to review many of the approaches to spatial and urban planning.

Finally, he pointed out that in the coming months we all had the challenge of facing the hunger problems that, everything indicates, are going to occur in various geographies, especially in Africa, due to the collapse of the production and supply chain.

Carles Llorens, ORU Fogar general secretary

The secretary general explained the actions carried out during the pandemic. Beyond supporting the member regions in everything necessary and disseminating their actions, he explained that the organization's work had a phase more focused on the health issue and one more dedicated to the food sector since April.

Initially with very confusing information, ORU Fogar tried to spread reliable information. Thus, recommendations from the World Health Organization were disseminated, but also other WHO materials, such as a course for health workers, a protocol on how to act against the first cases of coronavirus or a manual on how to manage a coronavirus patient center, in countries with limited resources.

During the month of April, with a food alert situation in many countries, FAO recommendations and reports were released.

SANITARY ACTIONS

Rubén Berrios, regional councilor of Tarapaca, Chile.

The humanitarian issue generated by displacement was the main challenge during the crisis. On March 26, Bolivia closed its borders, even for Bolivians who were abroad. Thus, on the border between Chile and Bolivia, Bolivian adults, women and children met. The three mayors of the Chilean communes near the borders provided solidarity support, in cooperation with private entities and the International Organization for Migration. They managed to provide medical assistance, shelter and food for the 2,443 Bolivians. They set up centers to house them and health centers to monitor their health. From there, they organized his transfer to Bolivia. The communes involved had to send the groups divided into 16 buses, which represents a 25-hour trip, without being able to do a COVID19 test. Most of those blocked were able to travel to Bolivia, but at the time of this webinar, a group was still blocked in Chile.

Donatien Beugre, president of San Pédro, Côte d'Ivoire.

In San Pédro, an awareness campaign has been carried out to remind people of prevention measures through the local press. The eight local radio stations, which communicate in the 10 vernacular languages in addition to French, have been sensitizing in a loop since April 10, even to the most remote populations. A visit to the 11 sub-prefectures was organized to spread good practices and distribute hygiene kits and equipment. To support populations, food and non-food kits have been distributed at the regional level for several weeks in collaboration with the Ministry of Solidarity. On April 13, in San Pédro, a recently built center was opened with 20 beds, which are not yet used, but which are available in the hospital to receive coronavirus patients. At the time of the meeting, the San Pédro Region had no cases of COVID19.

Pierre Dimba, president of the Agneby-Tiassa Regional Council, Côte d'Ivoire

The country blocked the borders with the neighbouring countries and with the regions they also closed its limits within the country. The main challenge was to manage, with the prefectures, the transfers of the population between Abidjan, the capital and the cities of the interior. The country sensitized the population and delivered health products and protection materials to medical personnel thanks to the synergy between the central government, regions and local representatives. The Agneby-Tiassa region provided food and shelter for quarantined people from the capital. It also supported the informal sector by informing it about the fund created by the central government.

Adams Diouf, president of Kaffrine and the Association of Senegal Departments

In Senegal, the head of state convened a General Assembly in which the departments participated for decision-making in the face of the crisis. From here, the Senegalese departments launched health awareness and information campaigns through the media in each locality. Regional presidents have opened a fund upon request for each local community. Measures have been taken to control community pollution in relation to controlling the spread in poor towns and working class neighbourhoods. All mayors and department representatives have formed a Covid19 coalition in collaboration with civil society and the Senegal Chamber of Commerce to stimulate mask production.

Luís Mariano Fernández, secretary of International Relations of Tucumán (Argentina) and secretary of Zicosur.

Once the pandemic was declared, this province, the most densely populated in Argentina, enabled a reception protocol for people who came from abroad, including 450 tucumanos spread around the world who returned to their homeland. Thus, all access roads to the province were controlled, with patrols on all routes. Once at this checkpoint, everyone's temperature was taken to detect symptomatic cases and a quarantine was initiated. People with symptoms, the least, went to the hospital. The rest went to the 3 hotels enabled at very low prices. For people who did not have the possibility of financing a hotel, 130 hostels were set up on premises donated by the municipalities. This entire operation has meant having 10,000 people in quarantine. At the beginning of the quarantine and five days later, the protocol stated that a swab test should be done. If both were negative, the person could go home, where he remained isolated. On the 16th and the 28th, he had to undergo a swab again. If at the end of this process everything was fine, the person could return to a normal life, go shopping and not be in total isolation as during the process. Everything has been controlled and organized by an emergency operation committee.

Ramon Guevara, governor of Mérida, Venezuela.

In the State of Merida, the pandemic has come at a time when Venezuela's national problems mean that supplies and basic services are not guaranteed. The governor said that not only do



they lack electricity for 7 hours a day, but they also lack domestic gas and gasoline. The lack of fuel, he explained, was especially serious because it affected agriculture. With the emergence of the Covid-19, the State of Mérida and the national executive power, parked their differences and decided to mobilize all the necessary resources, in order to control the pandemic. Only one case of covid-19 was reported in Merida, of someone returning from Shanghai. Having such little impact has been fortunate in that Merida has only 10 artificial ventilators and 2 hospitals enabled to manage the pandemic. The great concern was, in any case, the return of the Venezuelan diaspora, which has followed a strict quarantine, consistent with the recommendations of the World Health Organization.

Martín Guillermo, general secretary of the Association of European Border Regions.

As an ARFE representative, Martin Guillermo stressed the importance of the joint initiative of African countries to close the borders to European citizens, to stop the spread. In Europe, border control at cross-border posts was re-established. This represented a challenge to avoid a second wave, despite the onset of mistrust. The measure showed that some regions were better equipped and prepared than others, which shows an inequality in capacities. And it also revealed a serious lack of coordination between cross-border countries. The national withdrawal that the pandemic has revealed is, in any case, dangerous. Thus, it is necessary to review how globalization is developing and also how to deploy mutual protection, particularly in the European community.

Yeboue-Kouame Kouassi Pascal, president of the Béliers Regional Council, Côte d'Ivoire.

The Béliers region is essentially rural, with a very low population density, which may explain that, until the moment of the meeting, it has no positive case of COVID-19. As soon as the coronavirus appeared, the region participated in all the control committees established by the prefects. Its action is mainly focused on the awareness campaign. The Regional Council visited and brought posters and health kits to 400 villages throughout the territory. At the moment, the situation is under control, but we must project ourselves into the future, have a reflection committee on COVID19 and foresee the implementation of good practices similar to many of those promoted by members of ORU Fogar.

Amedee Pare, secretary general of the Hauts Bassins Regional Council, Burkina Faso

The Hauts Bassins regional committee has been deeply involved in fighting the pandemic. First, by raising awareness, through the media and associations, of hygiene measures, of the need for social distance and of creating barriers. Then, in the strictest scope of the health sector, acquiring technical equipment and products to help hospital staff. The region has also had to get involved in helping the most vulnerable people. Communities are ultimately responsible for implementing national decisions on economic measures.



Abdessamad Sekkal, president of the Regional Council of Rabat Salé Kénitra, Morocco

Since the detection of the first coronavirus cases, Morocco was one of the first countries to apply containment, social distancing and border closure measures. From here, the central government and regions created the National Solidarity Fund. This fund has increased the number of resuscitation beds (from 1,600 beds to more than 3,000 beds), but has also strengthened the textile industry to produce 10 million masks per day. These masks are now exported to other European and African countries. Within the framework of the Association of Regions of Morocco, Rabat Salé Kénitra has purchased and distributed health and protection products. Beyond this, the region has provided vehicles for the movement of medical personnel. Regarding social assistance, food has been distributed and a considerable effort was made to house the homeless in the centers so as not to leave anyone on the street. At the regional level, means have been implemented to guarantee working conditions through hygiene measures. To guarantee the continuity of economic activity, in Rabat Salé Kénitra, the projects undertaken in the region have been maintained.

Hassane Soumana, secretary general of the Association of Regions of Niger

In Niger, the regions worked together to strengthen their economy through an awareness campaign as soon as the capital closed. Public service was reduced by 90%, which helped control the spread, but this had negative consequences in dealing with some community problems. Houses of worship have been closed to dedicate hygiene kits to essential public places, such as markets. This has been essential for the proper functioning of the community. In this way, in front of and within each market, a space has been established for citizens to wash their hands, in order to optimize hygiene measures. Now it's about perpetuating achievements.

Federico Trebuçq, International Secretary, Province of Córdoba, Argentina.

The Province of Córdoba has created an emergency operations center (COE), which is an interdisciplinary command, which coordinates all actions to combat the pandemic. The center brings together national and regional public health, fire, military, and police services. All this reinforced by 11,000 civilian volunteers. With this multidisciplinary coordination, the 427 localities of the province who know how, when and where to go in case of a person affected by Covid-19. The center has been responsible for the distribution of preventive sanitary materials that came from the nation, so that a formless distribution has been guaranteed and that it reaches all corners of the province. Likewise, a technical operation center has been created that works to maintain contact with health institutions.

ACTIONS IN THE SOCIAL OR FOOD FIELD

Francisco Andramuño, director of International Cooperation of the Prefecture of Morona Santiago, Ecuador.

Morona Santiago was the province with the least infections at the country level. With the state of alarm, regional governments and the central government agreed to close borders and control that the people who enter respect the sanitary protocols. Within Morona Santiago, the prefect worked with the mayors to deliver what they need to the most affected sectors. The province, above all, ensured that the production of the field reached the urban sector through a barter system. It was about having cities provided through direct contact with the territory. All this counting on the complementarity of the province's territories, with different products due to their different climates. Likewise, "A garden for all" was launched, a project to make it possible to cultivate in all corners where there is land and which allowed to market with neighbours. All this from the conviction that it is essential to return to the earth, to solve the food problem.

Adama Diallo, president of the Department of Gossas, Senegal

Since the start of the pandemic, the regions have participated in Senegal's National Steering Committee COVID19. Thus, the regions were involved in all the decisions that, at the national level, affected public order: closure of airports, declaration of a state of emergency, prohibition to leave the departments ... This led the state to let the regions decide on certain measures. Thus, the state has provided food aid to 7,946 households in the Gossas department, but the Department has supplemented the aid with a transfer of 10 million CFA francs to support an additional 720 households. Public awareness campaigns, food purchases for confined families and purchases of hygiene products carried out by the Gossas department have also been implemented in the other departments, thanks to the departmental committees established to define a common strategy.

Maciste Diaz, governor of Huancavelica and President of the Mancomunidad of the Andes, Peru

The first problem that many regions encountered was that, in Peru, many people who live in Lima - where most of the population is concentrated - wanted to move to the interior of the country. The Mancomunidad had validated the proposal of the regional councils that prevented the return of people in other parts of the country. According to this decision, the people had to quarantine where they were and, after 14 days, the Mancomunidad had to send buses to transport the people. However, the media criticized this decision and 1,300 people came walking people from various regions. So they coordinated with the central government to send 22 buses and improvise shelters with all the comforts. Thus, 80% of the contaminated in the country, from Lima, were quarantined.

Jorge Guamán, Cotopaxi prefect, Ecuador.

The Cotopaxi provincial government organized the delivery of baskets with agrological products from local producers, especially among the most vulnerable urban sectors. It also implemented the exchange of products, taking them from the subtropical parts to the mountains and from the mountains to the coast, in a "randi-randi" (Quechua) barter system. Considering that the central government does not have a program planned for indigenous communities, Cotopaxi was in charge of organizing that the territorial fairs receive services of bonds provided by the state, transportation and exchange of products from the city to the countryside. Finally, the Cotopaxi prefect underlines the importance of networking at different levels, perhaps even between different Latin American countries.

Edwin Miño, executive director of the Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments, Ecuador (CONGOPE).

CONGOPE played a leading role, providing technical assistance to provincial government programs. The southern part of the country was particularly supported up to the Amazon, the most impacted by the crisis. Until the week before the webinar, the country's provinces delivered almost half a million food kits and solidarity baskets. Within the framework of CONGOPE, measures were discussed in collaboration with international organizations and public and private banks in Ecuador. Of the eight hundred thousand companies in Ecuador, there are thirty-six thousand linked to the food sector. CONGOPE attempted to ensure that cities had food, driving by controlling prices. This was done, however, to the detriment of the producer, so CONGOPE is taking up this problem and proposing solutions. In Ecuador, in addition to the health crisis, the humanitarian crisis of the Venezuelan diaspora is added, which should be monitored by international organizations present on the continent.

Miquel Royo, general director of Global Affairs, Catalonia.

Catalonia focused on assisting vulnerable people. Regarding to violence against women, the Catalan police doubled down on contacting women who have been abused in the past and the Government launched an emergency number campaign. For the protection of the elderly, it increased the inspections of nursing homes. Finally, to take care of the children or adolescents alone, whose parents were in quarantine, shelters were set up during the day. Hotels, empty due to lack of tourism, were also set up for people who could not quarantine at home. The Catalan Government provided 200 euros to single-parent families with dependent minor children. At the same time, a moratorium was adopted so that the 20,000 families that benefited from this aid did not pay taxes on basic food.

Mostapha Slisli, majority spokesperson Oriental Region, Morocco.

Morocco's central state has left some abilities to regional councils in order to handle the crisis. The Oriental Region contributed to a special fund worth 5 million euros, in coordination with



local authorities to help the 8 provinces of the region. In the field of health, the region has supported hospitals. Regarding the economy, the region had already implemented measures before COVID19 because it is experiencing other recurring crises, such as drought. This allowed him to finance the disinfection of the provinces with 10 million euros in funds from the rescue center, normally mobilized for other disasters such as fires. Since the beginning of the crisis, the region - in collaboration with the State - has invested 60 million euros, of which 9 million have been mobilized by the Regional Council to help companies and create more than 6,000 competitive jobs. In addition, a very forceful action is planned to support the tourism sector, which is very affected by the pandemic.

Ivonne Yáñez, director of International Cooperation of the Prefecture of Azuay, Ecuador

The province of Azuay organized three main actions in the food field. First, they sold thousands of baskets of products purchased to local producers. Second, during the first month, they delivered more than 50 thousand kits for free during the first month, to people in situations of greater vulnerability, including the Venezuelan population. And third, they delivered crop seeds to allow the continuity of local agricultural production. The provinces, and Azuay among them, have activated, on the other hand, a food barter system. For Ivonne Yáñez "the construction of food sovereignty is not only achieved through production, but also through exchange mechanisms at the national level." Although health as such is not the responsibility of the prefectures, in this emergency situation, the Ecuadorian provinces implemented their own measures. For example, in Cuenca, the capital of Azuay, several people from other provinces came to support the medical teams.

ECONOMIC REACTIVATION ACTIONS

Marcelo Carrasco, regional councilor of Araucanía and president of ANCORE

The Chilean regional governments have created different work commissions (health, productive promotion, social development) in order to coordinate their actions. Globally, the regions have allocated more than 120 billion pesos to face the emergency and articulate the local and national, generating direct investments through the ministry of health or local health departments. La Araucanía, specifically, has created an emergency commission with democratically elected representatives, who develop a plan regarding health, safety and the economy. The national government develops support programs for small and medium-sized companies, for which it has increased its budget. Each regional government, autonomously, has at least a billion pesos to face the emergency at the local and regional level.

Carolina Delvasta, representative of the National Federation of Departments, Colombia.

The National Federation of Departments in Colombia worked with the 32 governors to launch a campaign called "We are all a region." With this campaign, both cash aid and products have

been collected. Thus, the FND collaborated with different donors and with companies from different sectors, especially in the most affected departments. The bulk donations went to the national level, but also to specific departments. The Federation was the link between donors and the receiving departments, articulating a delivery that even demanded the use of airplanes to reach the Amazonian departments. He worked with the Ministry of Health, which is the leader of international cooperation, to guide and direct donations.

Ahmed Ezzahidi, vice-president of the Regional Council of Sous Massa, Morocco.

The economy of the Sous Massa region is based on agriculture, tourism and fishing. To help agricultural producers, meetings have been organized with producer associations and security measures have been implemented at the production sites and an employee meeting has been held. Regarding the solidarity economy, the region has created an association "Sous Massa Initiative" dedicated to the provision of credits of up to 30,000 euros for small businesses and small entrepreneurs who will also benefit from payment facilities. The region organizes periodic meetings with representatives of the various levels of governance and of the various economic sectors, in particular tourism, in order to create a fund to help companies in the sector and develop local tourism.

Fernando Galarza, director of International Cooperation of the Department of Tarija, Bolivia.

Tarija's economy depends almost entirely on oil and gas production. 90% of the income results from this production and export, for which the income of the country and the department fell significantly. The departments independently implemented measures, while applying national government measures. The national law decreed three new bonds for the elderly, early childhood, and the unemployed or those with no fixed income. Tarija decreed a three-month, \$ 100 departmental bond for mothers who have early childhood children. It also provided food baskets of products from its territory, to reactivate the small production of products that could not be imported due to the pandemic. Finally, the departmental government worked with banks to offer loans to small and medium-sized companies.

Fátima el Hassani, president of the Regional Council of Tangier Tetouan Al Hoceima, Morocco.

This highly populated northern region is among the three most affected by the pandemic of the Kingdom of Morocco. With a large concentration of industrial infrastructure and many companies, it has been essential to guarantee its activity. Thus, in parallel with the established National Action Plan, the Region Council has focused its activity on managing the crisis, prioritizing support for the economic and health sectors. Regarding social work, protection measures have focused on public officials and employees, who have continued to be paid. There have been no layoffs or reduced wages. Teleworking and shift schedules have been standardized for the teams, which are already organized in anticipation of the end of the running of the bulls. Food aid, which was distributed throughout the country, in Tangier Tetouan Al Hoceima reached 70,000 families in a more precarious situation.

Rafa Hueso, Foreign Relations Directorate, Basque Government.

The government of the Basque Country (with more than 1,400 killed by COVID-19) has taken various measures to overcome the crisis. Isolation has forced businesses, the self-employed, and businesses to close, resulting in a dramatic decline in GDP. To support small businesses and self-employed workers affected by the health crisis, the government will provide them with €568 million. Beyond that, and to meet the liquidity and financing needs of current assets in the first six months. It has been prepared several programmes with a budget of 500 million euros of loans, to support the network of Basque companies. At the initiative of the Basque Institute of the Institute of Finance, the programmes also have a financing line of 25 million euros lent to the self-employed and small businesses at 0% interest. Finally, the 'Bideratu' programme, which means 'directing', allocates EUR 20 million for restructuring and business recovery; an allocation of EUR 13 million will cover the costs; and a further EUR 6 million will be spent on the purchase of surplus perishable first-production products.

Camilo Lloreda, director of the Pacific Administrative and Planning Region, Colombia.

RAP Pacífico decided to divide its work in relation to the pandemic into two tempos. They dealt with the emergency first. The four governors of the RAP negotiated with the Ministry of Mines and Energy the 50% subsidy on the value of marine diesel fuel, for cabotage transporters on the Pacific coast. The region managed the donation of liters of alcohol to the departments of the region, in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and took advantage of its border position to collaborate with neighbouring countries such as Panama and Ecuador. Second, in a joint effort, private, public, business, governor, and civil society actors came together to represent the Pacific before the national government. Also, to agree common projects for after the crisis. In order to reactivate the economy, RAP Pacífico is working to strengthen agro-chains to ensure food security in the Pacific region, as well as to promote employment through a bag that allows companies to inject capital.

Soudjata Radjassegarane, director of Energy, Circular Economy and Biodiversity. Regional Council of the Ile de la Réunion, France.

Director of Energy, Circular Economy and Biodiversity. The Regional Council has competence in economic affairs and, therefore, since March 17, has implemented an exceptional regional economic plan. First, an emergency aid of 50 million euros was allocated to the companies. For very small companies, with less than 10 employees and that justify a loss of turnover of at least 20%, Réunion has created a Regional Solidarity Fund that contributes between 1,000 and 2,500 euros in aid. In association with the Investment Bank, the Regional Council has also created a Regional Guarantee Fund of 6 million euros, of which 3 million have been invested by the Region, to guarantee the strengthening of the financial structure of small companies. The region has also chosen to support small businesses in the digital transition, something vital for the continuity of their activity in this emergency context. The Exceptional Economic Committee for Crisis Management, created from the beginning of the spread, involves all actors in the public



and private sectors. In this way, from import and export professionals to the tourism sector, they have aligned themselves with public policies. Regional Council of the Ile de la Réunion, France.